Amendment Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Held at United Nations Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 8 January 1991, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. ALATAS (Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mrs. LOZANO (Colombia) said that the question of a complete ban on nuclear tests should not be viewed as a theoretical exercise, but, rather, as a major undertaking offering unprecedented benefits in terms of quality of life. Her delegation endorsed the view expressed by the Secretary-General at the fifteenth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament, that Governments had a duty to ensure the survival and security of their citizens, and that, given the catastrophic effect which a nuclear exchange would have on the peoples of all countries, the international community must insist on a reduction in and the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons.

2. For many years her delegation had been convinced that the most effective means of halting the nuclear arms race would be a complete ban on nuclear tests. Such a development would drastically reduce the qualitative rivalry between the nuclear Powers and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The 1963 partial test-ban Treaty had always been considered the first step towards the attainment of that objective. Numerous General Assembly resolutions supported by the non-nuclear-weapon countries condemned nuclear-weapon tests in all environments and reminded nuclear-weapon States of their special obligation to discontinue such tests pending the conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty. Failure to conclude such a treaty undermined the credibility of disarmament agreements, and refusal by any nuclear-weapon State to accept the proposed amendment to the partial test-ban Treaty could only be interpreted as a clear statement of intent to continue the development of nuclear-weapon systems.

3. The international community could not accept cosmetic agreements that did not eliminate the threat of nuclear weapons. It therefore could not permit a small number of countries to arrogate to themselves the capability of unleashing universal destruction in a world which had created the United Nations in order to promote peaceful coexistence. Without a ban, the new world security order advocated by the nuclear-weapon Powers was simply an illusion. The three quarters of mankind living in substandard conditions could not continue to wait while human aspirations were sacrificed to the madness of the arms race. The Amendment Conference provided an opportunity to change the terms of peaceful coexistence among nations.

4. Mr. MACKAY (New Zealand) said that all the participants in the Amendment Conference shared the objective of ending nuclear testing for all time, as had been foreseen in the preamble to the 1963 partial test-ban Treaty. That objective had been reiterated in the preambles to other treaties limiting the testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

5. New Zealand had long considered that there was an urgent need for a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty prohibiting all tests in all environments for all time, and had promoted resolutions along those lines for some 20 years. A

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comprehensive test ban was the most effective way of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

6. The Conference was taking place against a mixed backdrop of improved relations between the major nuclear Powers and progress in restricting the possession of nuclear weapons, offset by reminders of the dangers of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It provided the first opportunity in almost 30 years for all parties to the partial test-ban Treaty to discuss the issues involved in a comprehensive test ban. Some had already made clear their opposition to such a step, while many others, including New Zealand, had no such reservations. The Conference provided an opportunity to discuss those differences and address some of the difficulties encountered in earlier negotiations on nuclear testing.

7. Verification was one such issue. It had frequently been argued that a comprehensive test ban would not be verifiable and thus would not be practicable. It was, however, now technically possible by seismological means to detect underground tests, with a very high degree of confidence, down to very low levels. His delegation, together with that of Australia, had submitted a paper on verification (PTBT/CONF/4/Add.1). In that connection he commended the work carried out within the Conference on Disarmament by the Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts, and urged all countries to support work in that field. The recent ratification by the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of verification protocols to the Treaty on the Limitation of Underground Nuclear Weapon Tests (threshold test-ban Treaty) and the Treaty on Underground Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes (peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty) was encouraging, particularly with regard to acceptance of the utility of such verification procedures as hydrodynamic-yield measurement and seismic monitoring and of the principle of intrusive on-site verification.

8. New Zealand welcomed China's participation in the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban re-established by the Conference on Disarmament, and hoped that all nuclear-weapon States would seek representation on it. His delegation supported the expansion of the Ad Hoc Committee's mandate. The New Zealand Government welcomed the broader dialogue now under way among nuclear-weapon States in Geneva, and trusted that the Amendment Conference would contribute to progress in resolving what were issues of vital importance.

9. Mr. MOUSSA (Egypt) said that the convening of the Amendment Conference reflected an overwhelming desire to consolidate accomplishments in the field of nuclear disarmament. The various international instruments in that domain clearly indicated the existence of an obligation for States parties to those instruments to work towards the discontinuance of all nuclear-weapon tests. Such a goal was essential in order to strengthen the non-proliferation régime, since, in practical terms, it would result in the cessation of the nuclear-arms race.

10. Notwithstanding the divergent views of States at the Conference, all should display a spirit of accommodation so as to enable progress to be made towards the goal of eliminating the nuclear-arms threat. The timing of the Conference was

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propitious, given the recent positive developments in international relations; there was now an opportunity to address the objective of a world free of nuclear weapons rather than merely regulate nuclear armaments. With the emergence of the new world order, all nuclear-weapon States should seriously reassess the nuclear policies that had cast a shadow over the world for half a century.

11. Since the signing of the partial test-ban Treaty in 1963, nuclear arsenals had taken on monstrous proportions, a development made possible by energetic and ongoing test programmes. The prohibition of underground tests would constrain the development and deployment of new generations of nuclear arms, reduce reliance upon nuclear arsenals, reinvigorate efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation and substantially reduce the risk of future radioactive contamination of the environment. Accordingly, his Government supported the amendment of the partial test-ban Treaty, with a view to making the test ban comprehensive. Indeed, his Government favoured the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

12. It was regrettable that the role of the Conference on Disarmament had been limited and that no substantial progress towards a comprehensive test ban had been made. Nevertheless it remained the primary multilateral negotiating body for the conclusion of disarmament treaties. His delegation would like the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban to be accorded the negotiating mandate necessary for it to formulate a comprehensive test-ban treaty. He agreed with the representative of Sweden that following the conclusion of the Amendment Conference, machinery should be established to enable the Conference on Disarmament to initiate treaty negotiations leading to that end. Such an agreement would constitute the corner-stone of an effective international security system and would be an essential step in halting the nuclear-arms race.

13. The Conference provided a unique opportunity to expand and fortify the international non-proliferation régime. The relationship between the amendment of the partial test-ban Treaty and that of the non-proliferation Treaty was self-evident, since all items on the disarmament agenda were interrelated and progress in one area enhanced the possibilities of improvement in all other areas. That balance should be maintained so as to reaffirm the universality of the issues and goals of disarmament.

14. Since the non-proliferation Treaty would expire in only four years, emphasis should be placed on securing compliance with its provisions by all States. Vertical proliferation was a particular cause for concern, in view of the danger posed by existing nuclear arsenals. Egypt was attempting to consolidate regional non-proliferation through its initiative for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. Nuclear proliferation was the greatest security challenge of the 1990s, and a comprehensive nuclear test ban was a vital means of containing both horizontal and vertical proliferation.

15. A comprehensive test-ban treaty must include the necessary verification mechanisms and confidence-building measures to guarantee compliance with its provisions. He hoped that substantive negotiations would lead to an agreement on

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draft Protocol II of the Amendment to the partial test-ban Treaty, which dealt with that intricate and important issue. The recent conclusion of agreements and the advances in verification techniques should facilitate the effective verification of a comprehensive test ban. His delegation strongly disagreed with the arguments of some nuclear-weapon States parties to the partial test-ban Treaty that a comprehensive test ban would not be verifiable or that nuclear deterrence was an appropriate security measure that called for continued testing.

16. To date, all progress in the field of disarmament had been the fruit of a political will to further the goals of disarmament and to respond to both the security requirements of the negotiating parties and developments in international relations. He hoped that the current negotiations would be characterized by such a convergence of will. While some delegations had suggested pursuing a step-by-step approach to a comprehensive test ban, relying primarily on bilateral agreements, his delegation was convinced that such a course of action had not, as yet, proved its effectiveness in achieving the desired goal. Previous limited agreements, such as the threshold test-ban Treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty, had required lengthy negotiation and were founded on the concept of the limitation rather than the elimination of nuclear arms. Such a concept was illogical in view of the positive developments in international relations.

17. The adverse environmental, social and economic effects of nuclear testing could no longer be ignored. The health and well-being of a large segment of the world's population was being unjustifiably endangered by continued nuclear testing and the environmental degradation it caused. The widespread public support for a comprehensive test-ban treaty had become evident through the growth of such organizations as Parliamentarians for Global Action and Greenpeace International. The world economy also suffered from nuclear testing, since vast amounts of resources were being used for testing programmes instead of for more constructive purposes.

18. The current international climate reinforced the belief that co-operation and dialogue, not policies of deterrence or force, were the essential factors in ensuring security and peace for all States. He hoped that the successful conclusion of the Conference would reaffirm that belief.

19. Mr. GROOP (Finland) said that a comprehensive nuclear-test ban was a priority of the international community in the field of disarmament, for both security and environmental reasons. His delegation was prepared to contribute constructively to the general purpose of the Conference by participating in discussions on the requirements of an eventual comprehensive test-ban treaty, particularly in terms of verification. However, his delegation was not comfortable with the specific purpose of the Conference, i.e. to consider an amendment to the partial test-ban Treaty. It believed that successful disarmament measures should not be opened for renegotiations. In addition, successful disarmament negotiations required an appreciation of the security concerns and interests of all States, as defined by the States themselves. A flexible, step-by-step approach to a comprehensive test ban was a more realistic objective.

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20. The threshold test-ban Treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty were examples of progress towards disarmament goals. The non-proliferation Treaty had also been successful, and although its goals would be furthered by the cessation of nuclear tests, its functioning should not be damaged by an artificial linkage of the Treaty to any extraneous issue.

21. Although there was an absolute need for an eventual comprehensive test ban to be verifiable, doubts about the effectiveness of current verification methods should not constitute an obstacle to such a ban. The results of research conducted in Finland on the seismological verification of nuclear tests had convinced his delegation that existing methods could ensure adequate detection of nuclear explosions. That research project, which relied on a sophisticated national network of seismic stations with facilities for data transmission and processing, was Finland's contribution, as a member of the Ad hoc Group of Scientific Experts of the Conference on Disarmament, to the task of laying the technical groundwork for the verification of a test ban. The Amendment Conference provided an opportunity for those who participated in such activities to explain the technical requirements of a nuclear-test ban to a wider audience. It was important for all parties concerned to understand that global verification of a test ban would be a highly complex and technically demanding undertaking.

22. His delegation felt that the Conference on Disarmament, as the negotiating body of the international community for disarmament questions, was the appropriate forum for negotiating a comprehensive test-ban treaty. However, the Amendment Conference would serve its general purpose if it gave a political impetus to the cause of banning all nuclear tests. A serious discussion of the test-ban issue and of verification in particular, which could subsequently be continued at the Conference on Disarmament, would constitute an important contribution by the Amendment Conference.

23. Mr. SARDENBERG (Brazil) said that at a time when examples abounded of close co-operation between former rivals and of coherent and positive international responses to remaining sources of conflict, it was regrettable that disagreement persisted in the important area of nuclear testing. Despite the urgency of the goal of a comprehensive nuclear-test ban, the international community was remarkably late in its efforts to conclude a treaty to that effect. Brazil had signed the partial test-ban Treaty on the day on which it had been opened for signature in 1963, in token of its commitment to the eventual discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time. Moreover, Brazil had unilaterally waived its right to develop and use peaceful nuclear explosive devices, as part of the international effort to ban all nuclear explosions.

24. Since the conclusion of the 1963 partial test-ban Treaty, which contained a clear commitment to the goal of a comprehensive nuclear-test ban, no progress had been made towards that goal. Underground nuclear testing continued unabated; between 1963 and 1989, more than 1,200 nuclear tests had been recorded internationally, more than 1,000 of which had been conducted by the two main nuclear-weapon States. Apart from their political and security implications, those

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figures reflected the extremely grave risks to which the environment continued to be exposed. As the international community prepared for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, it should be recalled that the complete cessation of nuclear tests would be a fundamental step towards ensuring a safer and cleaner world environment, free from contamination by radioactive substances.

25. Multilateral consideration of a comprehensive test-ban treaty, particularly at the Conference on Disarmament, had shown no significant progress, yet the overwhelming majority of States had expressed unequivocal support for the cessation of all nuclear tests. Each year, the General Assembly had called upon the nuclear-weapon States to renounce nuclear testing in all environments, to no avail. The reasons given to justify continued testing, such as the need to maintain a credible deterrent nuclear power, were unacceptable; such arguments appeared to question the commitment expressly undertaken in the 1963 partial test-ban Treaty eventually to ban all nuclear-test explosions. The partial test-ban Treaty had been intended as a first step towards the goal of a complete ban on testing. The proposed amendment set out in the annex to document PTBT/CONF/8 had been endorsed by a wide majority of the States parties to the Treaty, and he therefore supported its adoption.

26. The question of verification was the issue which had blocked agreement on a comprehensive test ban in 1963. Since then, the international community had acquired vast experience in the verification of disarmament agreements. There was currently a virtual technical consensus that it was possible to verify a comprehensive test ban with the highest degree of confidence. For instance, the Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts had accumulated considerable experience in seismic detection techniques which could serve to verify a complete ban. Other possible techniques were also available and should be examined thoroughly, bearing in mind that the question of on-site inspections no longer appeared to be an intractable issue. The technical and political feasibility of verification had been underscored by recent bilateral agreements. The various aspects of the question should be given careful consideration in the context of the proposal to convert the partial test-ban Treaty into a comprehensive test-ban treaty. In that connection, he wished to refer to document PTBT/CONF/6, whose annex contained draft Protocol II of Amendment to the Treaty. Other issues relating to legal aspects of the proposed amendment should also be studied, particularly with regard to the question of peaceful nuclear explosions.

27. If the aim of the Amendment Conference was to make possible a serious consideration of all the issues involved, the time which had been allocated was clearly insufficient. General Assembly resolution 45/50 provided a possible solution to that problem. While not all delegations had supported the procedures outlined in that resolution, he felt that, with the necessary political will, a solution could still be found which would allow for a meaningful outcome of the Conference. On the other hand, if the international community failed once again to take practical steps towards the fulfilment of the commitments embodied in the partial test-ban Treaty, it would undermine the validity of that instrument, with negative consequences for nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon States alike.

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28. In a new and peaceful era, it was not enough to say that a nuclear war could not be won and must never be fought. The threat of nuclear war implicit in the very existence of nuclear weapons and in their continued development and testing must be eliminated. The record of negotiations for a comprehensive test-ban treaty was one of frustrated aspirations and missed opportunities. Never before, however, had the international climate been so favourable to progress in the field of disarmament. A firm commitment towards the negotiation of a comprehensive test-ban treaty would send a clear signal that international peace and security were no longer to be based on the threat of mass destruction.

29. Mr. MUNTEANU (Romania) said that his country, which had undergone a process of fundamental change after the December 1989 revolution, was firmly committed to the goal of arms control and disarmament, both nuclear and conventional.

30. Nuclear disarmament was one of the highest priorities for the international community. That objective could b achieved only through sustained and progressive efforts aimed at nuclear-arms limitation and disarmament. He therefore welcomed the INF Treaty and supported the speedy conclusion by the United States and the Soviet Union of a treaty on a reduction in strategic offensive arms. He also welcomed the decision by the United States and the Soviet Union to begin negotiations on the reduction of short-range nuclear forces in Europe, as well as the agreement on the verification protocols to the threshold test-ban Treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty, which had paved the way for the entry into force of those instruments.

31. The complete cessation of nuclear testing was a goal to which the three nuclear-weapon States parties to the partial test-ban Treaty had clearly committed themselves. His country supported a complete ban on nuclear testing, which would have a positive impact on efforts to end the nuclear-arms race and on nuclear disarmament and would strengthen the non-proliferation régime. He therefore shared the concern that, despite all the efforts made during more than a quarter of a century, the world had come no closer to achieving that goal. However, the new international situation offered better prospects for success.

32. His Government, which was committed to the principle that a complete ban on testing should be approached gradually, would welcome any new steps towards the further limitation of underground nuclear tests. The proposal to amend the partial test-ban Treaty was one possibility; on the other hand, the adoption of an additional protocol to the Treaty or the negotiation of a comprehensive test-ban treaty were also valid options. What was essential was the initiation of a genuine process of negotiations, to which the Conference could give an important political impetus.

33. It was extremely important for the Conference to ensure a climate favourable to constructive solutions. In that context, he welcomed the decision to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban at the beginning of the 1991 session of the Conference on Disarmament. In the same spirit, his country was participating in the work of the Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts.

34. Mr. ELIASEN (Denmark) said that since the entry into force of the partial test-ban Treaty, the international community had hoped and expected that it would also be possible to achieve a comprehensive nuclear-test ban. However, nearly 28 years after the signature of the Treaty, and despite many international efforts, that goal had still not been achieved.

35. The bilateral efforts made by the two major nuclear Powers were of great importance, and the step-by-step process of limiting nuclear tests, agreed on in 1987 by the United States and the Soviet Union, had been a welcome development. The process had led to the conclusion in June 1990 of two important verification protocols to the threshold test-ban Treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty, thus paving the way for the ratification of those two instruments. The negotiations should be continued and intensified with a view to achieving a comprehensive test ban.

36. With regard to multilateral efforts, the Conference on Disarmament was clearly the most appropriate forum for negotiations on a comprehensive test ban. He therefore looked forward to the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban at the beginning of the 1991 session of the Conference on Disarmament. Substantial work remained to be done on a number of relevant issues, including verification and compliance.

37. The Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts, in which his country had participated for several years, had achieved significant results in developing a concept for a global seismological monitoring system with a view to the verification of a comprehensive test ban. Verification techniques had advanced to the point where the outstanding problems in that area seemed to call for political, rather than technical, solutions.

38. A comprehensive test ban, while not an end in itself, would be an important step towards nuclear disarmament, especially as it would impede the development of new generations of nuclear weapons. The environmental and health risks associated with underground nuclear testing were an additional reason for the suspension of all test explosions.

39. The Amendment Conference would provide a valuable opportunity for a wide-ranging discussion of a comprehensive test ban and related issues. The objective of the Conference should be to give an impetus to the work of the Conference on Disarmament. It was important to uphold the principle of consensus in the work of the Conference, since a constructive outcome could be ensured only through decisions adopted by consensus.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.